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CIA covertly recruited prospects in a March 1977 visit to campus

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On Monday, March 28, 1977, a recruiter from the Central Intelligence Agency's Foreign Broadcast Information Center (FBIS) visited Columbia University.

The recruiter, a former Columbia student, met with two Columbia department chairmen to discuss the prospects of finding students qualified to become CIA foreign language specialists. Such talent, he was told, was "sparse," but one professor provided the names of three possible recruits and the other promised "to be on the lookout for qualified persons."

The recruiter's visit is described in an internal CIA memorandum, one of thousands recently released to Spectator under terms of the federal Freedom of Information Act. While no similar recruitment efforts are described in the documents, this meeting represents a pattern in the CIA's relationships with Columbia faculty members over more than thirty years.

The recruiter had studied with one of the department chairmen during his years at Columbia. They shared a professional interest—Eastern language studies, according to the FBIS documents. The CIA employee and the Columbia professors were working in separate, but overlapping, spheres: they knew each other and could help each other.

That common ground has been the foundation of contacts between faculty members and the CIA since as long ago as 1950, the CIA documents show. And while relationships between the Agency and faculty members may not be as formal as they were in earlier years, they continue until today.

CIA Director Adm. Stansfield Turner, in fact, will not even promise that the Agency has ended all covert contractual arrangements with Columbia faculty members. Congressional investigators, meanwhile, have found that such relationships existed, in 1976, on over one hundred American college campuses.

Who are the Columbia faculty members that maintain contacts with the CIA? The names of some of them appear in the papers released to Spectator. Other names have been blacked out by the CIA to protect the identities of those who, according to the CIA lawyers, have "strictly academic-based and non-covert" relationships with the Agency "which must remain confidential."

The names of the department chairmen involved in the March 1977 meeting, for instance, have been withheld by the CIA. One is identified as "Dr. (14-space deletion) chairman of the Department of (22-space deletion) at Columbia University." The other is called "Prof. (14-space deletion) who is chairman of the (25-space deletion) department at Columbia and on the staff of (24-space deletion) and the (27-space deletion)."

Comparing the length of the deleted phrases with the 1977 roster of department chairmen, it appears that the first reference is to Herschel Webb, chairman of the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures. The second seems to refer to James Morley, chairman of the Department of Political Science and a staff member in 1977 at the Southern Asian Institute.

Neither Webb or Morley denied participating in discussions with a CIA recruiter, but neither recalled the March 1977 meeting.

"I don't see any reason why anybody in March 1977 would have come to me with questions of that sort," Webb said in an interview, "because I wasn't chairman of the department at the time."

According to the office of the Dean of Graduate Faculties, Webb became chairman on April 1.

"I suppose I've known quite a number of people who've worked for the CIA," Webb said. "I can't categorically state in the hundreds and hundreds of people I've talked to since I became department chairman that there wasn't one who said he might be involved in recruiting for the government," he added.

Morley said that he "can't recall anything about" a 1977 meeting and "can't think of a student of mine who is recruiting." But Morley, like Webb, a Japan specialist, said he too knew several employees of the intelligence agency.

Both Webb and Morley said they never gave students' names to the CIA unless a student asked for help getting a job with the Agency. The Agency has acknowledged contracting with college professors to identify potential recruits without informing students that the CIA was considering employing them.

The University Senate resolved in 1978 that faculty involvement in such covert recruiting was "in no case" permissable.

It is not clear what happened to the three students' names given to the recruiter by one of the professors. The recruiter's report states that these names, and others, had earlier been given to a "John Fitzgerald' by the School of International Affairs' "placement officer."

In 1977, Eric Kocher, now a career counselor, was the assistant dean of SIA responsible for job placement. Kocher did not recall such a list, but noted he had repeated public contacts with James Fitzgerald, director of the CIA's local personnel office.

Kocher said he remembered an occassion similar to that described in the documents. "There was a supervisor or someone superior to Fitzgerald, probably a supervisor, I guess from Washington, who came to Columbia . . . to try to find just what the possibilities for students with language abilities might be." Such visits, Kocher said, "didn't happen very often."

James Fitzgerald said he does not "remember Eric Kocher ever giving me any list of names." Visits from alumni like the March 1977 trip occur, he said, "on occasion," though usually without his office's knowledge.

The 1977 episode, according to President McGill, "does sound like a traditional CIA recruiting practice." He termed "suspect" the two chairmen's meetings with the Agency representative.

"What is objectionable about that is an approach to a member of the faculty on a clandestine or confidential basis, while they are contemporaneously recruiting out in the open," McGill said.

But the President refused to commit himself to investigating the episode. "More substantial evidence" and an "egregrious act . . . that seems to violate the canons of conduct of a faculty member" would be prerequisites for university action on such a matter, he said.

Like Webb and Morley, several Columbia political scientists maintain academic-based relationships with the CIA. Assistant Professor of Government Thomas Bernstein, Associate Professor of Government Andrew Nathan, and Seweryn Bialer, acting director of the Research Institute on International Change, obtain documents from the Agency for use in classes and research.

Nathan once sought CIA analysts' comments on an academic paper. Bernstein said he "knows some people in the analyses section of the agency and find(s) that very useful" in his research.

Nathan, Bernstein and Bialer insisted they never receive classified material from the Agency. The documents they obtain from the CIA's Coordinator for Academic Relations and Office of Economic Research, they said, are generally not available elsewhere. Most involves statistics on Soviet and Chinese economics and politics.

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While the current [illegible] Columbia scholars—if the recently released documents tell the whole story—maintain contacts with the CIA for overt and benign purposes, that has not always been the case.

Throughout the 1950s and into the '60s, professors sought and directed CIA-financed research, but concealed the Agency's sponsorship of the work from colleagues, students and the public.

Studies of "scientific breakthroughs" at Teachers College (TC), personality theory at the Neuropsychiatric Institute and "Soviet psychological warfare" at a Columbia center in Virginia were all initiated by Columbia professors who had personal ties to the U.S. military and intelligence communities.

The same held true for a project aimed at developing a Russian-English technical dictionary and a proposal inviting CIA and military officers to study at Columbia's Russian Institute.

The TC study was proposed and directed by Professor of Natural Sciences Frederick Fitzpatrick, a U.S. Naval Reserve Commander who served as officer in charge of the Navy's curriculum section from 1943-1945. Fitzpatrick, who died in 1976, was said by colleagues to have had many connections with Navy personnel in Washington.

William Thetford, now a retired professor of medical psychiatry, worked from 1960 to 1966 on studies of human personality that were funded by CIA front organizations. In a letter to President McGill of October 1977, Thetford stated he knew throughout that time the real source of the funding. He had learned of it from Harold Wolff, a former colleague at the Cornell University School of Medicine who founded one of the front organizations with the CIA's aid.

Thetford wrote that he later regretted "not dissociating myself from the sources of funding," but indicated he believed at the time he was serving the country by performing the work.

Most telling of the origins of Columbia's early ties to the CIA are the relationships involoved with the three Russian-oriented projects.

From 1954 to 1955, Columbia operated the Virginia-based War Documentation Project, a study of captured documents on Soviet psychological warfare. Philip Mosely, director of the Russian Institute from 1951 to 1954, served as a consultant on the project. During World War II, Mosely was a State Department officer, and he represented the U.S. at the Moscow and Potsdam Conferences.

[illegible] steering committee that developed the Russian-English dictionary. With him on the panel were Professor of Physics I.I. Rabi, who had worked on the Manhattan Project at Columbia, and Schuyler Wallace, then director of SIA. Wallace had directed the wartime program that prepared American soldiers to govern occupied countries.

The most direct link of all related the CIA to Columbia's Russian Institute. The institute was founded in 1956 by Geroid Robinson, who during the war was chief of the USSR division of the research and analysis branch of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). OSS was America's first intelligence agency, the wartime predecessor to the CIA.

In 1950, Robinson invited 50 CIA, foreign service and armed forces officers to study at the institute. Documents indicated the CIA's response could not be found by the Agency. That generation of World War II relationships has ended with the deaths or retirements of the principals. The new generation's ties to the intelligence community, according to the documents and interviews with professors, are more remote and open.

But secret relationships, which would necessarily go unrevealed in the papers released to Spectator, may persist between Columbia professors and the Agency.

President McGill concluded in 1977 that, from evidence available to him no such relationships existed. In a letter, he asked Adm. Turner of the CIA for confirmation of his findings.

Turner wrote back that McGill's statement was "not a conclusion that I am prepared to either affirm or deny." Turner said personal service contracts and other relationships were often entered into by the Agency with academics and others. Some of these contacts, he wrote, could not be disclosed for security reasons, but most were kept confidential to protect individuals from "harassment or other adverse consequences." Disclosure, then, is "left to the discretion of the individuals involved," Turner explained.

Stansfield Turner
...service contract

Philip Mosel (left) worked in CU project t study Soviet wai fare papers.

Geriod Robinson (right) founded the Russian Institute, the university's most direct link with the CIA.